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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/FO AND NEA/I. NSC FOR PHEE AND VROOMAN

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TAGS: [IR](#) [IZ](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQI PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT DISCUSS
IRAN-IRAQ BORDER DISPUTE, ELECTIONS, AND SECURITY WITH
CODEL MCCAIN

REF: A. A) BAGHDAD 3334

[B](#). B) BAGHDAD 0028

Classified By: DCM ROBERT S. FORD FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Senators John McCain (R/AZ), Joseph Lieberman (I/CT), John Barrasso (R/WY), and John Thune (R/SD) on January 5, 2009 held meetings with Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and Vice President Adil Abd al-Mahdi to discuss the recent Blackwater ruling, upcoming Iraqi national election, and Iraq's regional relations. In separate meetings, both Talabani and Abd al-Mahdi discussed the status of Iraqi relations with Iran relative to the Fakkah oil field incident. Additionally, Talabani commented on the seriousness of recent demonstrations inside Iran and cautioned the U.S. against showing public support for the Iranian opposition, which could undermine their credibility. For his part, Abd al-Mahdi discussed the need for Iraqi elections to be seen as transparent and legitimate, and noted the importance of a timely government formation period. With regard to the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq, Abd al-Mahdi acknowledged progress made in strengthening the Iraqi Army, but stressed the importance of not overestimating Iraq's capabilities. He called for the U.S. and Iraqi governments to reassess the current security situation and revise the security agreement accordingly after the new Iraqi government is established. End Summary.

REPERCUSSIONS OF BLACKWATER RULING

[1](#)2. (C) President Talabani remarked that he hoped the incident would not affect the relationship between Iraq and the U.S. and commented that even in Iraq, courts are independent and sometimes issue decisions that those in the government do not agree with, but such rulings must be obeyed regardless. The Vice President stressed the importance of an appeal as the Iraqi people are looking for justice. Abd al-Mahdi noted that in a separate incident one of his personal guards was killed by an intoxicated Blackwater employee.

THE IRAN-IRAQ BORDER DISPUTE

[1](#)3. (C) Abd al-Mahdi commented that Iraqi relations with Iran are at a low point, noting that what the Iranians did in Fakkah was a mistake. (Ref A) He said that both countries acknowledge that the Fakkah oil well is in a disputed area, because of the unclear border between Iran and Iraq, but he

believed the situation was returning to normal as evidenced by the Iranians removing their flag from the field. The Vice President stressed that because of Iraq's shared border with Iran, it is very important to maintain good relations between the two countries, just as the same is true for Iraqi relations with Turkey and Syria. He believed that Iraq could not risk its future by entering into a new conflict with Iran. Abd al-Mahdi stated that Iraq cannot wage war against its neighbors, and said that the more problems Iraq has with its neighbors, the more they must negotiate to overcome those problems.

¶4. (C) Talabani commented that the 1975 Algiers Agreement (on border delineation) is the root of many problems surrounding the Iran-Iraq border. The President commented that in some places the Iranians are moving toward the border because of what they see as laid out in the 1975 Agreement, but said Qwhat they see as laid out in the 1975 Agreement, but said that the Iraqis do not recognize the agreement because it was formalized under the Saddam regime.

TALABANI: U.S. SHOULD BE MINDFUL OF IMPACT OF SUPPORTING IRAN
OPPOSITION

¶5. (C) When asked about the ongoing demonstrations in Iran and whether such events pose a real threat to the Iranian regime, Talabani said that the current demonstrations are very serious and represent the division among the political leaders and religious authorities trickling down to the street level. The President commented that Iran has a diverse population, with differences among all groups running

deep with a long history. He stressed that it was not that the Iranian regime was weak, but rather that the opposing side was strong. Talabani said that the Iranian opposition included both experienced Iranian politicians, to include Mousavi, Rafsanjani, and Karrubi, and important religious figures. He also commented that whereas the demonstrations at first were attacking Iranian President Ahmadinejad, they have now shifted to being against Supreme Leader Khamenei. Talabani said that the Iranian government feels threatened. In response, Iran has threatened to use any force necessary, and was presently trying to pass a law in the Parliament to hang those found to be against the regime. Talabani also commented that historically major leadership changes in Iran begin in the main cities and spread throughout the country. He opined that what is currently transpiring is reminiscent of past major changes in Iran. However, he believed that unlike in previous scenarios, the current regime is able to threaten people without any fear of a third party stepping in. Talabani said for example that the Shah was somewhat tempered by his fear of the U.S. intervening, but that no such moderating force presently exists.

¶6. (C) With regard to any possible show of U.S. support to the Iranian people, Talabani cautioned that the U.S. must consider how the Iranian regime could use a show of U.S. solidarity toward the Iranian opposition to further label the opposition as agents of the U.S.

¶7. (C) Referring to his conversations with Syrian President Bashar al-Asad, Talabani said that the Syrians deny suicide bombers enter Iraq via Syria and say they support Iraqi unity and security. Talabani opined that certain parts of the Syrian regime were supportive of such terrorists. Talabani also commented that none of Iraq's neighbors are happy about Iraq's success and do not want a strong, united Iraq, as they fear Iraq as a model of democracy in the region and Iraq's ability to assume its share of the oil market. However, Talabani stated that regardless of the positions held by its neighbors, Iraq will continue to advance in achieving its goals.

ABD AL-MAHDI HINTS FASTER GOVERNMENT FORMATION IN 2010

¶8. (C) Adil Abd al-Mahdi in response to an inquiry into his assessment of the upcoming Iraqi national election said that he believed that elections are always good, especially in a country working to move past a history of tyranny and dictatorship and embrace democracy. He hoped to see a transparent and legitimate election, free from foreign interference, and noted that the provincial elections demonstrated that Iraq is moving in the right direction with this regard. The Vice President believed that holding a successful national election would help to further stabilize the Iraqi political system. He hoped that participation in the election would be as high as that of previous elections, but acknowledged that turnout could be somewhat less. Abd al-Mahdi commented that the four-month delay in forming a government following the previous national election was damaging to Iraq and sent the wrong message to Iraq's enemies. He noted that Iraqi blocs currently are engaged in negotiations in an effort to minimize the length of the government formation period.

¶9. (C) Abd al-Mahdi said he believed "popular mobilization" was the best method to campaign for the national election, whereby candidates get out to visit various neighborhoods and go house to house engaging the Iraqi population. The Vice President also commented that campaigning will utilize both radio and television, and that during this campaign season there would also be several debates. Abd al-Mahdi noted that elections in 2010 will differ from the previous national elections, in that the Iraqi people will vote for individuals as opposed to lists, which he believed was a positive change and would result in less polarization. Additionally, he observed that there were good and respected names on the candidate lists.

¶10. (C) When asked, Abd al-Mahdi acknowledged that he is a contender for the prime ministership, but noted that as is the case in all elections, the election outcome and alliances formed would ultimately determine the next prime minister.

(Comment: It was evident that Abd al-Mahdi clearly remembers the role that the U.S. Ambassador played in preventing him from becoming Prime Minister in 2006 because of his ties to Iran. End Comment.)

TALABANI: SHIA LISTS WILL DOMINATE

¶11. (C) President Talabani when queried as to his election predictions said that he believed the winning bloc would either be Maliki's State of Law or the Iraqi National Alliance (INA), with Allawi's list coming third. Regarding the Kurdish bloc, Talabani said that the PUK and KDP lists will be united, but that all Kurdish parties will be working to advance themselves. However, he stated that regardless of election outcome, the Kurds will remain a united force in Baghdad.

ABD AL-MAHDI CAUTIONS AGAINST OVERESTIMATING IRAQI FORCES

¶12. (C) In response to an inquiry into concerns surrounding the U.S. withdrawal and the readiness of the Iraqi Army (IA) to fill that void, Abd al-Mahdi said that there are less fears of this prospect than there were two years ago. The Vice President acknowledged that there are good signs of development in the IA, but said he thought all parties overestimated progress made and said he would qualify the current situation in Iraq differently than some of his colleagues would. He said that two months ago others within the GOI believed Al-Qa'ida was finished and argued for the removal of T-walls, but that he believed Al-Qa'ida was not finished, but rather would spread if left to its own devices.

Abd al-Mahdi believes the GOI and U.S. government must reassess the current security situation in Iraq and the next Iraqi government and the U.S. should revise the security agreement accordingly, especially in light of recent attacks targeting government buildings in the center of Baghdad.

¶13. (C) The Vice President said that logistically and strategically we are winning the war, but that all parties must remain aware that this reality could shift. Abd al-Mahdi stressed that we should not "underestimate our enemy or overestimate our forces." He said that with all of the positive developments in Iraq, one can see a certain light at the end of the tunnel, but that Iraq can do better in all areas, from regional relations to countering terrorism.

SECOND ROUND OF OIL BIDDING, ABSENCE OF U.S. COMPANIES

¶14. (C) President Talabani expressed disappointment that more American companies did not participate in the second round of oil bidding in Iraq. Talabani said that for many years he has encouraged President Bush, and now President Obama, to support U.S. companies' investment in Iraq, noting that the U.S. administration was always waiting for the Iraqi oil law to be adopted by parliament prior to encouraging such investment. (Ref B)

¶15. (U) CODEL McCain cleared this message.
HILL